

## Taking the Research Journey Together: The Insider and Outsider Experiences of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Researchers

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**Abstract:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia are among the most researched in the world. Indigenous research methodologies reframe a historical colonial-centric and often exploitative research paradigm, to instead privilege the voices and perspectives of Indigenous peoples within a social justice framework. In this article, we describe the lessons learnt in a research partnership between an Aboriginal and two Anglo-Australian researchers conducting an arts-based action research project in collaboration with five Aboriginal communities in New South Wales, Australia. We identify the importance of reflexivity to shed light on the impact of insider and outsider status in order to design and conduct culturally and ethically informed research with Aboriginal communities. Reflexivity, and a collaborative, adaptive approach to research processes also operates to ensure cultural and professional integrity are embedded into such research projects.

### Table of Contents

- [1. Introduction](#)
- [2. Aboriginal People and Research](#)
  - [2.1 Indigenous research methodologies](#)
  - [2.2 Reflexivity](#)
  - [2.3 Insider and outsider perspectives](#)
- [3. Taking the Research Journey Together as Insider and Outsiders](#)
  - [3.1 Establishing a working relationship](#)
  - [3.2 Designing culturally and ethically informed research methods](#)
  - [3.3 Being accountable to community](#)
- [4. Lessons Learnt](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[References](#)

[Authors](#)

[Citation](#)

## 1. Introduction

In this article, we describe the lessons learnt while jointly conducting research as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers using an arts-based action research method involving five Aboriginal communities in New South Wales (NSW) Australia. We are all female researchers, Elizabeth (Liz) McENTYRE is a Goori woman and descendant of the Worimi and Wonnarua peoples of NSW and Angela DEW and Priya VAUGHAN are Anglo-Australian. At the time of working together, Liz and Priya were completing their PhDs, and Angela was a mid-career researcher six years post PhD. Angela had worked in the community service sector prior to a later-life career in academia, Liz had worked in the government

and Aboriginal community-controlled sectors prior to commencing her PhD, and Priya had worked as a junior researcher across various universities and research institutions. Before describing the lessons learnt from our research partnership, in Section 2 we situate our work within the changing nature of Indigenous research in Australia and globally with a particular focus on the role of insiders and outsiders in Indigenous-specific research. Through a description of the research project that brought us together we reflect in Section 3, on the negotiation of our insider and outsider status and, in Section 4 on the lessons learnt. The substantive findings of this study are reported elsewhere. In this article, we focus on the relationship and approach we developed—as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers—to work in a culturally appropriate and responsive way with Aboriginal community groups in order to conduct research and develop a [community planning resource](#). [1]

## 2. Aboriginal People and Research

Over ten years ago, MELLOR, BRETHERTON and FIRTH (2007, p.15) reminded us that:

"Aboriginal people have suffered severely as a result of White settlement, which brought the introduction of new diseases, dispossessed them of their land, and destroyed many aspects of their culture. Dispossession and oppression have resulted in social disintegration, economic marginalization, unacceptable health standards, and lack of opportunity. Even today, nearly 30 years after the recognition of Aborigines as citizens, they still experience pervasive, overt, and covert racism in their daily lives". [2]

In addition to ongoing social disadvantage, racism, discrimination and marginalisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples—the Indigenous or First peoples of Australia—have been the subjects of research throughout the 230 years since European invasion. According to Karen MARTIN and Booran MIRRABOOPA (2003, p.203), Aboriginal people are "one of the most researched groups on earth". For much of this time, the research was conducted without Aboriginal people's consent, and with little or no community consultation. As reported by MELLOR et al. (2007, p.20), almost four decades ago Black American academic, Wade NOBLES (1980) coined the term "scientific colonialism" to describe the sense of exploitation Indigenous people felt about the research process. BAINBRIDGE et al. (2015) and GILROY, DEW, LINCOLN et al. (2018) noted that all too often research made little or no positive contribution to the lives of Indigenous people. New Zealand Maori academic Linda TUHIWAI SMITH (2012, p.1) bluntly stated "The word itself, 'research' is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary". [3]

## 2.1 Indigenous research methodologies

For so long, non-Aboriginal scholars trained in western methods of research and in pursuit of academic careers dominated the field of investigation and were supported to use their privileged position to study human societies and cultures other than their own. During this time, the lives of Australian Aboriginal peoples were studied and misrepresented through western modes of theoretical knowledge, western-subjectivities, photographs, artefacts, media and the written word (MORETON-ROBINSON & WALTER, 2009). Western scientists used these studies to compare Aboriginal peoples' lives with their ways of knowing and living. Over the past two decades, Indigenous scholars from around the world have challenged this colonial-centric research approach to develop an Indigenist research methodology aimed at reframing the power imbalance (ABSOLON & WILLET, 2004; BAINBRIDGE et al., 2015; BASKIN, 2005; BATTISTE, 2008; CHILISA, MAJOR & KHUDU-PETERSON, 2017; GILROY, UTTJEK, GIBSON & SMILER, 2018; GILROY, DEW, LINCOLN et al., 2018; KOVACH, 2005; MARTIN & MIRRABOOPA, 2003; MELLOR et al., 2007; MORETON-ROBINSON, 2013; RIGNEY, 1999; TUHIWAI SMITH, 2012). Leading theorist on Indigenous research methodologies, Linda TUHIWAI SMITH (2012, p.4) described a "burgeoning international community of indigenous scholars". TUHIWAI SMITH situated the decolonisation research agenda as one of self-determination of Indigenous peoples set within a social justice framework. This viewpoint reflects the earlier work of Canadian Cyndy BASKIN who observed "an agenda for Aboriginal research must focus on the goals and processes of decolonisation and self-determination. A research project that does not contribute in some way to these objects is not worth doing" (2005, p.174). [4]

The development and use of Indigenist research methodologies directly addresses structural inequities which operate to validate (and consequently *invalidate*) particular systems of knowledge in order to maintain hegemonic (often colonial) power structures. Canadian Marie BATTISTE (2008, p.6), noted

"different groups in society use knowledge and control of knowledge and its meanings in order to exercise power over other groups ... [this] ensures a cognitive imperialism around knowledge that positions some groups in power and others to be exploited and marginalised". [5]

Indigenist research methods, which are structured around, and guided by, Indigenous epistemologies and theories (KOVACH, 2005), unsettle these pervasive, and often unexamined, hierarchies of knowledge. [6]

As articulated by Lester-Irabinna RIGNEY (1999), Indigenist research methodology has three core principles: 1. resistance as an emancipatory imperative, 2. political integrity in Indigenous research, and 3. privileging Indigenous voices in Indigenist research. Therefore, RIGNEY's Indigenist research is for "Indigenous Australians whose primary informants are Indigenous Australians and whose goals are to serve and inform the Indigenous liberation struggle to be free of oppression and to gain power" (1999, p.637). [7]

MARTIN and MIRRABOOPA developed a contemporary theoretical framework and methods to guide Indigenous research by expanding on RIGNEY's principles to recognise and situate the centrality of Aboriginal "worldviews, our knowledges and our realities as distinctive and vital to our existence and survival" (2003, p.205). Alongside the privileging of Aboriginal voices in research, MARTIN and MIRRABOOPA's approach emphasised the importance of research capturing how Indigenous people's past, present and future lives are shaped by historical, political and social contexts. [8]

GILROY et al. (2018) and GILROY, DEW, LINCOLN et al. (2018) described decolonising research methodologies applied to disability, as those where research design and implementation are driven by Aboriginal peoples' concerns and priorities. These authors argued that adopting this approach within the realm of disability research could reverse the power imbalances symptomatic of colonial research approaches, so that Aboriginal people with disability, individually or through their community-controlled organisations and/or representative bodies, determined the research agenda and approach. In his PhD thesis, John GILROY (2013) applied Indigenous standpoint theory to disability scholarship moving beyond traditional Western research practices towards a cultural interface where Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge and research methods were brought together. [9]

Similarly, Roxanne BAINBRIDGE and colleagues (2015, p.698) writing about Australian Indigenous health research used the term "reciprocity" to mean "inclusion, recognition of partners' contributions, and ensuring that research outcomes include equitable benefits ... for communities or individuals". They proposed establishing close partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers and research users through participatory action research approaches to strengthen relationships and maximise the benefits of knowledge and expertise brought by all stakeholders. [10]

Indicative of the global rise of Indigenous research methodologies, African researchers CHILISA et al. (2017), described an Indigenous relational perspective involving four "Rs" of accountability: "respectful representation, reciprocal appropriation and rights and regulations" (p.328). The authors suggested that diverse Indigenous cultural understandings and values should determine research methodologies, data collection, and dissemination strategies. They argued (p.331) that this could be achieved through "multi-epistemological research partnerships" between Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars who work together to define research agendas and methodologies that "legitimise all knowledge systems". Furthermore, CHILISA and colleagues described the usefulness of individual and community narratives to provide information about physical and cultural locations, and ecological connections and relationships which are so important to Indigenous peoples' worldwide. The authors highlighted that Indigenous narratives provide research participants with a way to "define themselves in relation to others around them, the land and the environment" (p.334). [11]

## 2.2 Reflexivity

In order for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers to work effectively in partnership, MARTIN and MIRRABOOPA (2003) and BAINBRIDGE and colleagues (2015) identified the importance of engaging in reflexive practices. From the Aboriginal researchers' perspective, MARTIN and MIRRABOOPA (2003, p.212) explained that

"... reflexivity is a process that allows us to work from Aboriginal centres and ensure we work with relatedness or self and Entities. Reflexivity challenges us to claim our shortcomings, misunderstandings, oversights and mistakes, to re-claim our lives and make strong changes to our current realities. Being reflexive ensures we do not compromise our identity whilst undertaking research". [12]

Most importantly, reflexive practice encourages Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers to critically reflect on their research ideas, epistemologies and approaches to ensure they are not unwittingly perpetuating colonising practices and thus further marginalising Indigenous peoples within research (SHERWOOD, 2010; WALKER, SCHULTZ & SONN, 2014). Indeed, as ABSOLON and WILLETT noted, any research undertaken with Aboriginal peoples "... through a non-Aboriginal epistemological lens can only yield findings that are distorted and incorrect" (2004, p.11). Similarly, KINGSLEY, PHILLIPS, TOWNSEND and HENDERSON-WILSON (2010) noted that without oversight of Indigenous partners, non-Aboriginal researchers may mis-interpret research findings due to a lack of cultural understanding. TUHIWAI SMITH (2012) described the uncomfortable situation in which many Indigenous researchers find themselves, straddling both Indigenous community and Western academic worlds with little guidance in how to navigate either. Representing a team of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers, BAINBRIDGE and colleagues (2015) acknowledged that reflective processes "encourage the development of shared understandings" (p.701). [13]

## 2.3 Insider and outsider perspectives

The differences between researchers who have shared lived experience similar to their participants (in the context of this research, those who are Aboriginal) compared to those who do not (non-Aboriginal) has been described using the terms *insiders* and *outsiders*. Sonya DWYER and Jennifer BUCKLE (2009) noted that shared status has benefits in gaining access and an introduction to participants and provides a common basis for the research. Christina CHAVEZ (2008) described the benefits and drawbacks of being an insider researcher. Benefits include positionality or familiarity with the research group, access to participants and the community under investigation, and the ability to adapt or tailor activities relating to data collection, interpretation and representing the needs of participants. Challenges include the assumption that insider researchers have prior knowledge relating to the subject under investigation, meaning participants do not always provide full information. CHAVEZ recommends insiders are provided with support and training in order to navigate potential

biases. Linda TUHIWAI SMITH (2012) noted that Indigenous researchers may be regarded as outsiders when working with communities other than their own or may be perceived as "the outsider within" or "partial insiders" (p.5) even within their own community due to their tertiary education and positioning as *researcher*. [14]

DWYER and BUCKLE (2009) concluded that the most important qualities a researcher could bring, regardless of insider / outsider status, were openness, authenticity, honesty and a commitment to provide an accurate representation of participants' experiences. Applying this to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research context, KINGSLEY et al. (2010) suggested that outsider non-Indigenous researchers could learn culturally appropriate research methods while being guided by insider Aboriginal researchers. In this article, we provide a scholarly reflection on the process of Aboriginal researcher, Liz, guiding non-Aboriginal researchers, Angela and Priya, to engage in culturally appropriate ways with Aboriginal communities. [15]

### **3. Taking the Research Journey Together as Insider and Outsiders**

The aim of the research project which brought Liz, Angela and Priya together was to develop a resource for use by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community organisations assisting Aboriginal people with disability to make plans about the supports and services they needed. The research and development of the guide was commissioned by the NSW Government department for disability and was one of a suite of planning resources developed by Angela and colleagues. The study received ethics approval through the University of New South Wales Sydney and the NSW Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council's Human Research Ethics Committees. All participants provided written consent. [16]

#### **3.1 Establishing a working relationship**

As a lead-in to secure funding for the study, Liz and Angela conducted an initial consultation with one Aboriginal Elders group in a remote town in NSW. The aim of the consultation was to identify whether the Elders felt there was a need for research on planning with Aboriginal people with disability and, if so, how the research should be undertaken to ensure cultural respect and appropriateness. Potential issues to be canvassed in the study were also identified. [17]

Liz and Angela had not previously worked together but had knowledge of each other's work and interests. Recognising Liz's status as an Aboriginal woman already known to the Elders, it was agreed that she would lead the consultation. During the two-hour meeting, Liz invited the Elders to tell their stories about living with a disability, and/or caring for someone with a disability, in a remote town. First, Liz shared her personal experience as the sister and guardian of a man with a mental and cognitive disability and it was evident that the Elders respected Liz's candour and willingness to share her own story. This also confirmed Liz's insider status as both an Aboriginal woman and as a family member of a person with disability. Although Liz was afforded insider status in this Aboriginal community, and with many communities that she had previously worked with, she was always

cognisant and respectful that she was a visitor on another's country<sup>1</sup> and grateful that she had been welcomed and accepted so warmly and openly by the communities. Angela shared her experience of previous research about planning in the disability sector and her experience working with rural and remote communities including Aboriginal communities. This positioned Angela as having knowledge about both the topic and the geographic context and provided a basis for shared understanding despite Angela's outsider status as a non-Aboriginal person. Liz addressed the Elders using the culturally appropriate nomenclature of Auntie or Uncle, and, in keeping with STEWART and ALLAN's (2012) recommendation to provide an informal and relaxed environment in which to establish trust and rapport, Liz allowed each person the time they needed to tell of their lived experiences in their own way. This often involved a person situating themselves within their family and community, identifying their cultural roles and responsibilities, and describing their generational connections to country, including the lands and waterways. In recounting their experiences, the Elders identified many challenges which they, and others in the community, faced trying to get the help they needed in the geographically isolated town. The discussion naturally turned to ways in which making a plan might help overcome some of these challenges. [18]

With the Elders' permission, we audio-recorded the consultation and also took extensive notes. Following the consultation, Angela and Liz wrote a report outlining the concerns and issues raised by the Elders directly using their words and examples. While Angela took the lead in drafting this report, Liz ensured the language, tone and structure of the report would resonate with the Elders and other Aboriginal people. The draft report was sent to the Elders group for their input prior to submission for funding and some minor changes were made incorporating their feedback. Based on the final report, funding was secured for a six-month study which involved the same Elders group along with other members of that remote community, and consultation with another four Aboriginal community groups across urban and rural NSW. [19]

This initial consultation, in addition to establishing a relationship with the Elders group and providing evidence on which to base the successful funding proposal, allowed Liz and Angela to establish a working relationship in which both felt comfortable and confident of the other's approach and contribution. Priya joined us to conduct the funded study. While undertaking research for her PhD focused on Aboriginal Art, Priya had collaborated with a number of Aboriginal artists, and scholars, who had mentored her regarding appropriate and respectful research processes. Working in rural and remote locations inevitably involves researchers staying overnight which provides opportunities for socialising outside of the research context and after work hours. Sharing this social time meant Liz, Angela and Priya got to know each other on a personal basis, each finding out about the others' family, interests and previous work. As a research team, we created an anti-hierarchal environment where each researcher felt able to assert her rights to contribute her insider and outsider expertise to the study, thus minimising any

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<sup>1</sup> Aboriginal people use the term "country" to describe the physical, spiritual, social and cultural connection they have to the land, waterways and atmospheres of their ancestors.

potential discontent which may arise during research involving multiple people. We achieved this by taking a collaborative approach to planning and problem solving. We listened to each other and were attentive and responsive to each team members' experiences, feeling and ideas. We sought to learn from, and with each other, and this contributed to an atmosphere of respect, trust and equity. [20]

### **3.2 Designing culturally and ethically informed research methods**

To conduct the funded study, we wanted a research method that would engage and resonate with the Aboriginal community groups with which we would work. Angela had previously successfully adapted the arts-based research method of body mapping to explore planning with people with intellectual disability and complex support needs to develop a [planning resource guide](#). Priya had previously used body mapping with young people experiencing anxiety, depression and psychosis. Body mapping is an individually focussed research method in which the participant draws a life-size outline of his or her body on a large piece of arts paper and then fills the inside and outside of the body outline with visual and text representations of their experience of the topic under investigation (DE JAGER, TEWSON, LUDLOW & BOYDELL, 2016). One of the benefits of the body mapping approach is that it enables the participation of people who might otherwise not engage in research including those who may be reluctant to take part in a formal interview and uncomfortable about articulating their opinions (DEW, SMITH, COLLINGS & DILLON SAVAGE, 2018). STEWART and ALLAN (2012, p.122) described the use of cultural mapping by social workers working with Aboriginal people in NSW and noted that "Diagrams are useful techniques for people who are not used to talking therapies, have limited vocabularies, have low literacy or prefer to tell stories using practical and concrete examples". [21]

As described earlier, many Aboriginal people report feeling alienated from research due to past negative experiences in which their words and artefacts were appropriated and mis-represented by non-Indigenous researchers. We wanted a method informed by Indigenist research methodology which would privilege the voices of Aboriginal participants and give them control over the way their views were represented within the resource. One of the very clear messages we heard in the initial consultation with the Elders group was that Anglo-Australian individualistic views often do not resonate with Aboriginal people, many of whom hold a collective world view (STEWART & ALLAN, 2012) involving a shared sense of responsibility within the context of family, community and country (AVERY, 2018). We were concerned therefore that the individualised body mapping approach would not be suitable to use with Aboriginal people. Additionally, the resource we were commissioned to produce was focussed on community organisations working with individuals, rather than for use by an individual per se. From Liz's personal experience and Angela and Priya's previous work with Aboriginal communities, we also recognised the importance of art to many Aboriginal people and believed the community groups would find an arts-based research method culturally acceptable and collectively enjoyable. [22]

In discussing adapting the arts-based body mapping technique to create a culturally appropriate collective approach, we looked to community mapping. Community mapping has been used globally in community development work to bring together a group of people to map community assets for the purposes of infrastructure and resource planning (PRESTON CITY COUNCIL, n.d.; WATERAID, 2005). Using the same basic community mapping process, we adapted the method to engage small groups of up to eight Aboriginal people with disability, family members and support workers across five communities to each create community maps. [23]

Rather than an individual participant drawing their own body outline, we asked group members to represent their country and community on blank arts-paper by drawing the features that defined their knowing or conception of country. The maps focussed on the strengths, resources, services and supports of the community and encompassed local history, values, traditions and stories to create a visual representation of each community's identity, connections and sense of place related to being an Aboriginal person with disability. [24]

Four of the communities we worked with were based in rural areas and those groups immediately drew geographic features: the rivers, ocean, roads, bridges and settlements (including missions and reserves<sup>2</sup>) that defined their country. Additionally, they added cut out pictures and drawings of flora and fauna local to their area. The urban group represented on their map the mix of Aboriginal communities from across NSW who migrated to the urban setting for accessing work and other services. All groups added to their maps local organisations and services that Aboriginal people with disability used, and also represented barriers they encountered to using them. [25]

As they worked on the maps, conversations flowed within the full group and also within smaller sub-groups of two or three people who worked together on discrete sections of a map. In creating their maps, participants recounted their experiences of discrimination and alienation from the mainstream services and supports available for people with disability and reinforced the sense of belonging they encountered in Aboriginal-specific organisations even though these were not specialised in supporting people with disability. Participants also reflected on various personal and community histories embedded within the country they were mapping. In particular they discussed life on the mission, the stolen generations, forced dislocations from place, and other corollaries of ongoing colonisation. These stories were articulated in order to situate and contextualise their experiences of accessing services and supports with the explicit aim of helping Angela and Priya understand participant needs and expectations around disability support. Through these stories, Angela and Priya gained an appreciation for how historical injustices underpin Aboriginal people's contemporary interactions with mainstream services and supports and the people who deliver them. [26]

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2 In the 19th Century missions were established by a variety of religious denominations and government-controlled reserves were set up on the outskirts of towns to manage Aboriginal people forcibly removed from traditional lands.

Throughout the community mapping sessions, Liz, Angela and Priya adapted their roles within each group so that the strengths of individuals and the group were maximised. For example, in conducting the community mapping session with the organisation with whom we had initially conducted the consultation, a gender split occurred within the group. The five women participants initially chose to sit separately away from the arts paper, while the two men immediately started drawing and writing on the paper to create the map. Initially, Angela tried to encourage the women to come over to the map but with little success. Thinking of ways in which she could engage the women and ensure their contribution to the map, Angela took to the women magazines and scissors and encouraged them to cut out pictures of flora and fauna and text they might want to add to the map. While looking through the magazines, Angela chatted to the women about how disability impacted their community and families. In this way, Angela acted as a go-between for the women and the map. Meanwhile, Priya and Liz worked with the men engaging them in transposing their discussions onto the map and adding the cut-out pictures from the women relayed by Angela. Eventually, the women came over to the map to see how the men had incorporated their input, and they added some additional material to the map. This gender role differentiation did not occur in any of the other groups and may have related to the older age group of most members or that the men in the group were seen as community decision-makers. Reflecting on this together at a later date, we agreed it had been a useful experience demonstrating how we could adapt the method to the specific needs of each group, and our individual strengths as researchers, while still completing the community map. [27]

As indicated in the above example, each mapping session was unique, with participants engaging with and contributing to their community map in different ways. While some participants were immediately comfortable drawing on their map, others preferred talking about their experiences with Liz, Angela and Priya and having others represent these experiences on the map. In a couple of sessions participants asked us to draw on the map on their behalf, so that the ideas and issues they were discussing could be visually illustrated and, thus, captured as research data. At first, Angela and Priya as non-Aboriginal researchers felt uncomfortable drawing on the maps, fearing that it might seem as if they were exercising their power as members of the dominant culture by interfering or taking over, even though they were the minority in the sessions. However, Angela and Priya took their lead from Liz who instinctively drew on the maps as she engaged in conversation with participants. Participants also reassured us that doing this drawing was another way of facilitating their contribution to the map and reinforced the egalitarian and shared nature of the activity. This taught us the importance of being willing to adapt to the needs of participants, even if this meant us taking part in the research process in unanticipated and unexpected ways. [28]

At the conclusion of each group, Priya photographed the community map, and the original was left with the community group to display and add to as they wished. We used the photographs for analysis and as a basis from which to reproduce map images in the resource. This strategy of leaving the maps in the

communities was agreed to early on in our discussions about the research approach. We all agreed that leaving original maps with the communities that created them was important for credibility and demonstrating to the communities that, whilst data for the study, their map—which embodied and represented their cultural knowledge, symbols and representations—was owned by the community and should remain in community hands. Leaving maps was also intended to demonstrate our commitment to an ongoing relationship with participants which included circulating drafts of the resource, garnering and responding to participant feedback, and bringing research outcomes back to community. [29]

The community mapping method was successful as an active, inclusive, community-based, rather than individual-centred, approach. As a creative activity it served to engage participants and researchers in discussion in an informal, flexible, and fun way. As mentioned, some participants were initially a little reluctant to engage most likely because this research method was so very different to past research experiences of individual interviewing. However, once the process was underway the majority of participants relaxed and enthusiastically took part, with most contributors telling us at the end how much they had enjoyed themselves. We recognised that taking part in research is time consuming, and emotionally draining and we acknowledged people's time and expertise by giving them a gift voucher and providing a catered lunch. These principles of valuing people's input were integral to the research design agreed upon by all of us from the outset. [30]

### **3.3 Being accountable to community**

At the commencement of the project we established an Advisory Group made up of Aboriginal-led organisation representatives with expertise working with Aboriginal people with disability. This group provided advice to Angela, Priya and Liz on the approach taken, introduced and connected us with local Aboriginal governed organisations, assisted in the development and, at the conclusion of the study, helped to disseminate the resource. During the course of the study, we contacted each identified local Aboriginal-led organisation to work out how best to engage with members of their community. Liz had direct links with four of the five communities and the Advisory Group linked us with the fifth. We were led by each organisation about the timing, venue and other logistics. We provided financial support to each organisation for a local facilitator's time, catering and for participant transport if required. [31]

During development of the resource we returned to the communities which had participated and shared draft versions of the resource with them inviting their critical feedback as to whether their ideas and experiences were accurately represented. Many participants gave extensive time and feedback at both a micro-level (words and language) and a macro-level (structure and content). We incorporated this feedback into subsequent iterations of the resource. Each of the community groups received copies of the final resource. A group member in one community drew on the map a representation of what he described as "a disconnection between disability services and Aboriginal people and families who

need those services to live well". In developing the resource, we invited and paid this participant to recreate this map sketch as an acrylic painting on canvas and an image of this artwork was reproduced on the cover of the resource (Illustration 1). The artist described the white circles as depicting the services with Aboriginal people sitting around waiting for those services to engage with them and work collaboratively. The grey area at the centre of the painting shows that the process of accessing and receiving disability services is not clear and lacks transparency. This depiction and explanation informed the name of the resource: "No More Waiting". We commissioned an Aboriginal graphic designer to work with us to produce the resource and she incorporated artwork from each of the maps within the resource. Through these activities we engaged Aboriginal people and communities at every stage of the project from design through to dissemination.



Illustration 1: No more waiting [32]

#### 4. Lessons Learnt

In addition to producing a visually beautiful and well received resource, Liz, Angela and Priya's research partnership transcended the insider / outsider roles of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers. We learnt from each other how to conduct research with Aboriginal people with disability, family members and organisations in culturally responsive ways that gave back to, rather than purely taking from, Aboriginal communities. We were guided by the Indigenous research principles outlined by Lester-Irabinna RIGNEY (1999) and MARTIN and MIRRABOOPA (2003) to ensure Aboriginal voices were privileged throughout the research process with Aboriginal people's experiences, expertise, and preferred approaches underpinning our engagement and method. The maps created by the community groups situated the experiences of Aboriginal people with disability within their historical, political and social contexts as described by MARTIN and MIRRABOOPA. The maps provided a space to represent individual and community narratives which, as described by CHILISA and colleagues (2017), situated participants in relation to other Aboriginal people with disability, organisations, and country. [33]

As Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers, we developed a close partnership based on respect and recognition of the value of learning from each other (BAINBRIDGE et al., 2015). Opportunities to reflect on our approach (CHAVEZ, 2008; DWYER & BUCKLE, 2009; KINGSLEY et al., 2010) throughout the six months of the project ensured that we challenged and resolved issues inherent in our different positions as insider and outsiders. In so doing, we claimed our shortcomings and learnt from our mistakes (MARTIN & MIRRABOOPA, 2003). For example, Angela and Priya learnt from Liz how to ensure Aboriginal participants were given the time and space to tell their story and represent this on their map, in their own way. As identified by MARTIN and MIRRABOOPA, this narration style often involved reference to cultural location and connection. On first appearances and viewed from an Anglo-Australian (Angela and Priya) perspective the information given in this way did not always seem to be strictly relevant to the research topic, but during analysis it was revealed as a critical frame for the resource. This realisation on the part of Angela and Priya of the inter-connectedness of Aboriginal people's lives in relationship to place, ancestry, and culture influenced a fundamental shift in the ways Angela and Priya regard their research relationships with Aboriginal people. As non-Aboriginal "outsiders" Angela and Priya acknowledge they can never fully understand an Aboriginal world-view; nonetheless, through this work they have developed a greater respect and appreciation of the richness and holistic nature of Aboriginal people's lives. The experience taught us to look beyond immediate and presenting issues (so much a part of an Anglo-Australian mindset), to take account of the multi-layered, interwoven and multi-generational Aboriginal world-view which influences how and from whom supports, and services may be sought. Angela's extensive experience working and researching with people with disability could at one level, provide her with "insider" knowledge and status. However, Aboriginal understanding and response to disability is very different to an Anglo-Australian approach and so, while Angela brought an understanding of the mainstream

community services, she had much to learn about how Aboriginal people with disability interacted with these systems. [34]

One of the community groups included in the project was Liz's home community. Prior to this project Liz had conducted research with many Aboriginal communities other than her own. Liz found being acknowledged in her own community as a credible researcher responsible for bringing benefits to Aboriginal people with disability and their families, both a pleasurable and satisfying experience. In the other communities Liz was a *visiting insider*—an Aboriginal person who nonetheless did not belong to that community. In this situation, MARTIN and MIRRABOOPA (2003, p.205) described the need to respect local social mores and "situate ourselves as Aboriginal people in our own lands and when in the lands of other Aboriginal people". [35]

Liz's insider status and pre-existing relationships with community members in the majority of the sites visited undoubtedly opened doors for Angela and Priya as non-Aboriginal researchers. Angela and Priya were aware of the generosity Liz showed by enabling access to these communities and introducing Angela and Priya to Elders and community members. The awareness that Liz was supporting our access to community and vouching for us as researchers and human beings, added, for Angela and Priya, an additional feeling of responsibility to ensure we undertook respectful, ethical and proper research. In addition to this, during the research process, Angela and Priya observed the way Liz's presence acted to reassure participants and to facilitate open communication between community members and the research team as a whole. For example, a participant, who was describing a particular community dynamic and its impact on access to services, asked Priya whether an Aboriginal researcher would be helping with analysis and write up. When Priya affirmed this was the case the participant smiled and answered, "great, then they will be able to help you understand what I meant". This exchange illustrates the way Liz's presence signalled to community members, that research processes, data analysis, and dissemination of research material would be kept on the right track by an Aboriginal person who had a fundamental understanding of the issues and experiences described. With this in mind, we conclude in keeping with ABSOLON and WILLETT (2004) and KINGSLEY et al. (2004) that Indigenous research must include, and indeed cannot proceed without, Aboriginal researchers at the helm. [36]

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